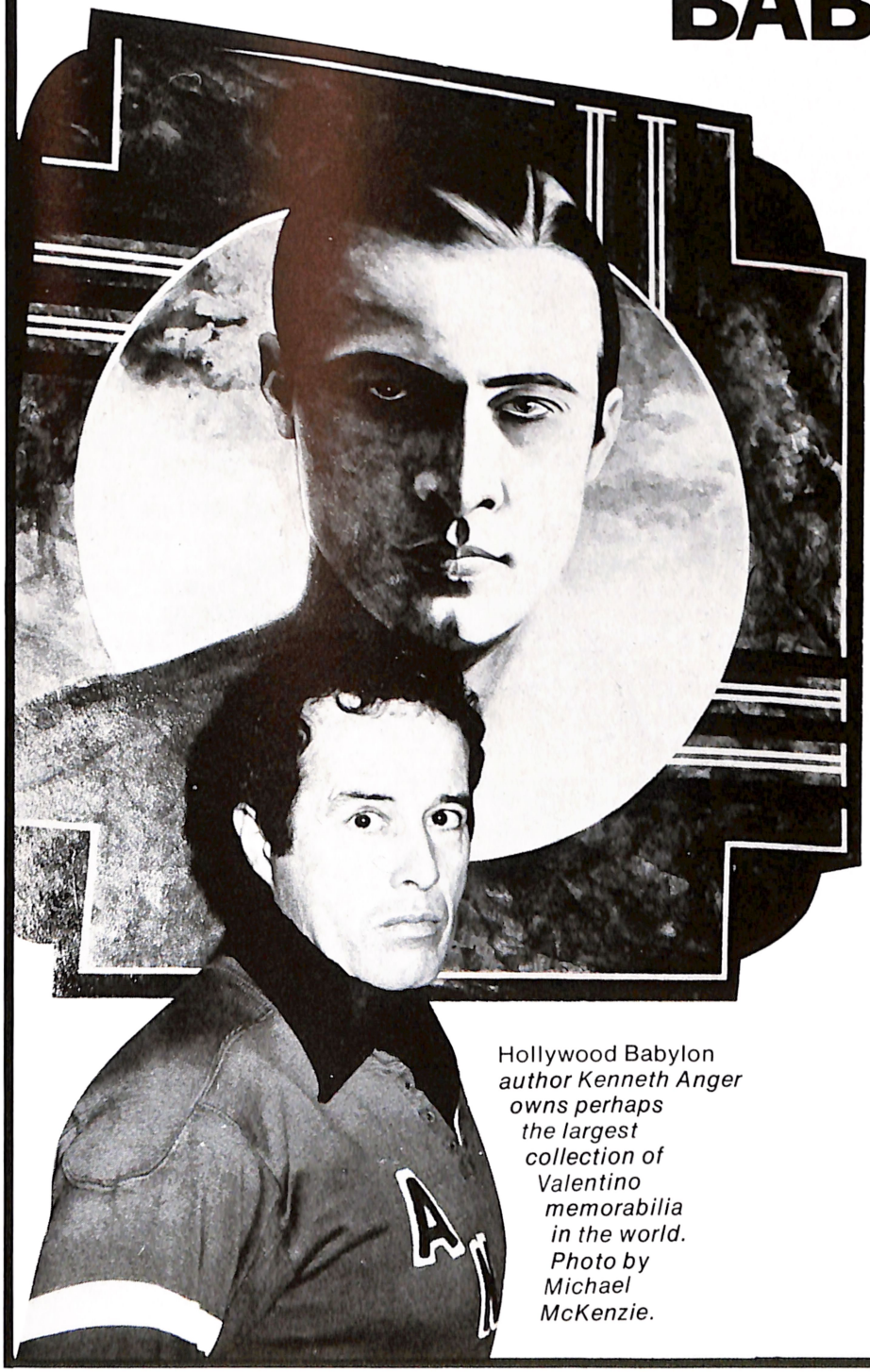
Kenneth Anger's HOLLYWOOD BABBLES ON



Hollywood Babylon *author Kenneth Anger owns perhaps the largest collection of Valentino memorabilia in the world. Photo by Michael McKenzie.*

Interview by Michael McKenzie
Redacted by Michael Llewellyn

The New York Upper East Side apartment of filmmaker-author-actor-collector Kenneth Anger is much like his work: a careful assemblage of bizarre elements basking in a somewhat magic light. The living-room carpet, ceiling and walls—all in red—create a slightly surrealistic aura, while in another room a cardboard stand-up of Frankenstein looms larger than life in a dim blueness. Choice autographed photos of early Hollywood stars glare from the walls. Prominent among the group are several classic shots of Rudolph Valentino, recently returned after an exhibition in Chicago to Anger's archives, probably the most extensive collection of photos of the silent screen's Latin lover.

Anger enters the room wearing a blue Rangers hockey shirt. With typical aplomb he has removed the first and last letters so that the shirt reads "anger." Born and raised in the Hollywood-Beverly Hills milieu, Anger started in movies at age three, appearing as the Changeling Prince in Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. At nine, he found himself on the other side of the camera, making short 16mm films which "...even then were conscious efforts to express my opinions as a director. You could say they were little artworks, conceived and titled—never things like mom and dad in the backyard. I made a conscious decision to work strictly in silent films, to 'shoot wild' as they say in Hollywood. In other words, I wanted to work purely in visuals. You have so much more freedom. It's like shooting stills."

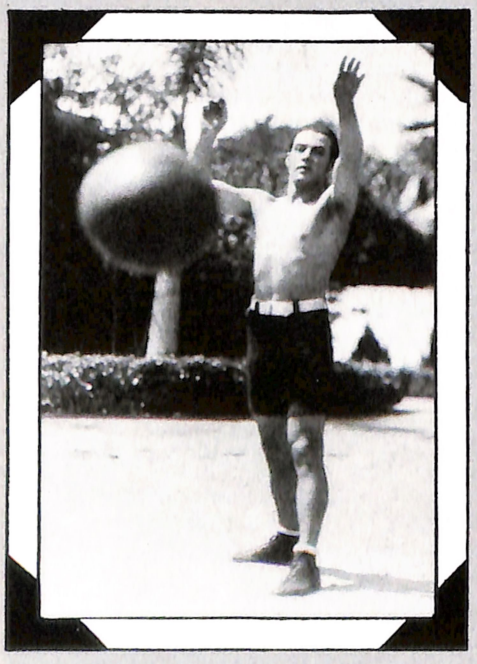
Kenneth Anger's HOLLYWOOD BABBLES ON

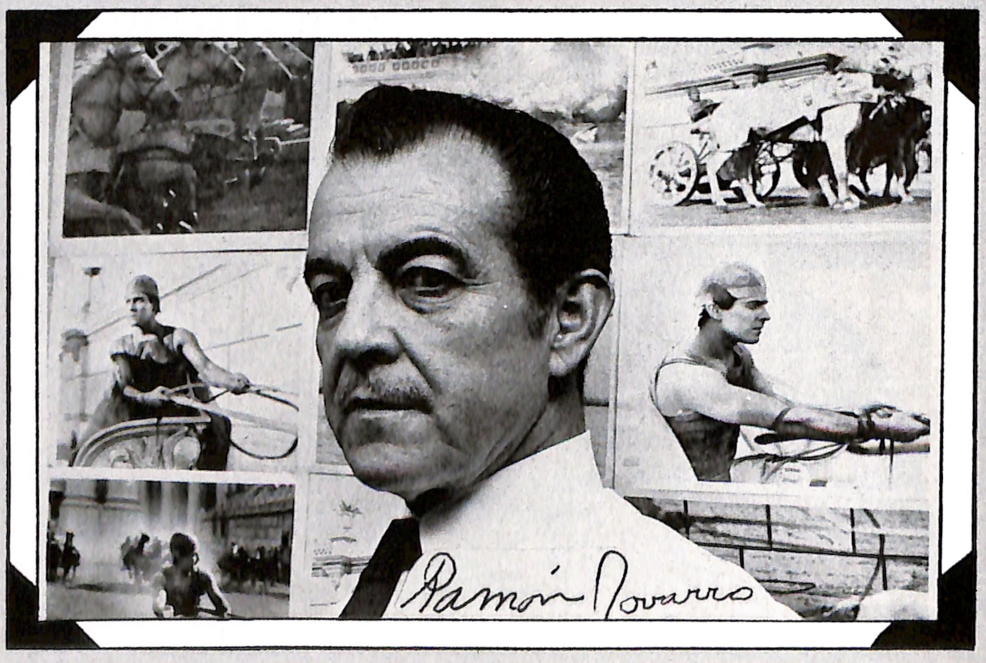
Valentino collectors' items owned by Kenneth Anger include the candid photo below, taken by silent screen star Ramon Novarro in 1922. Novarro himself, below right, posed against stills from his film Ben-Hur, *was murdered by two Hollywood hustlers who were brothers. The weapon they used: a dildo. Anger tells the story in* Hollywood Babylon, *which will soon have a sequel. The 1923 Valentino portrait opposite, also in Anger's collection, is by Apeda.*

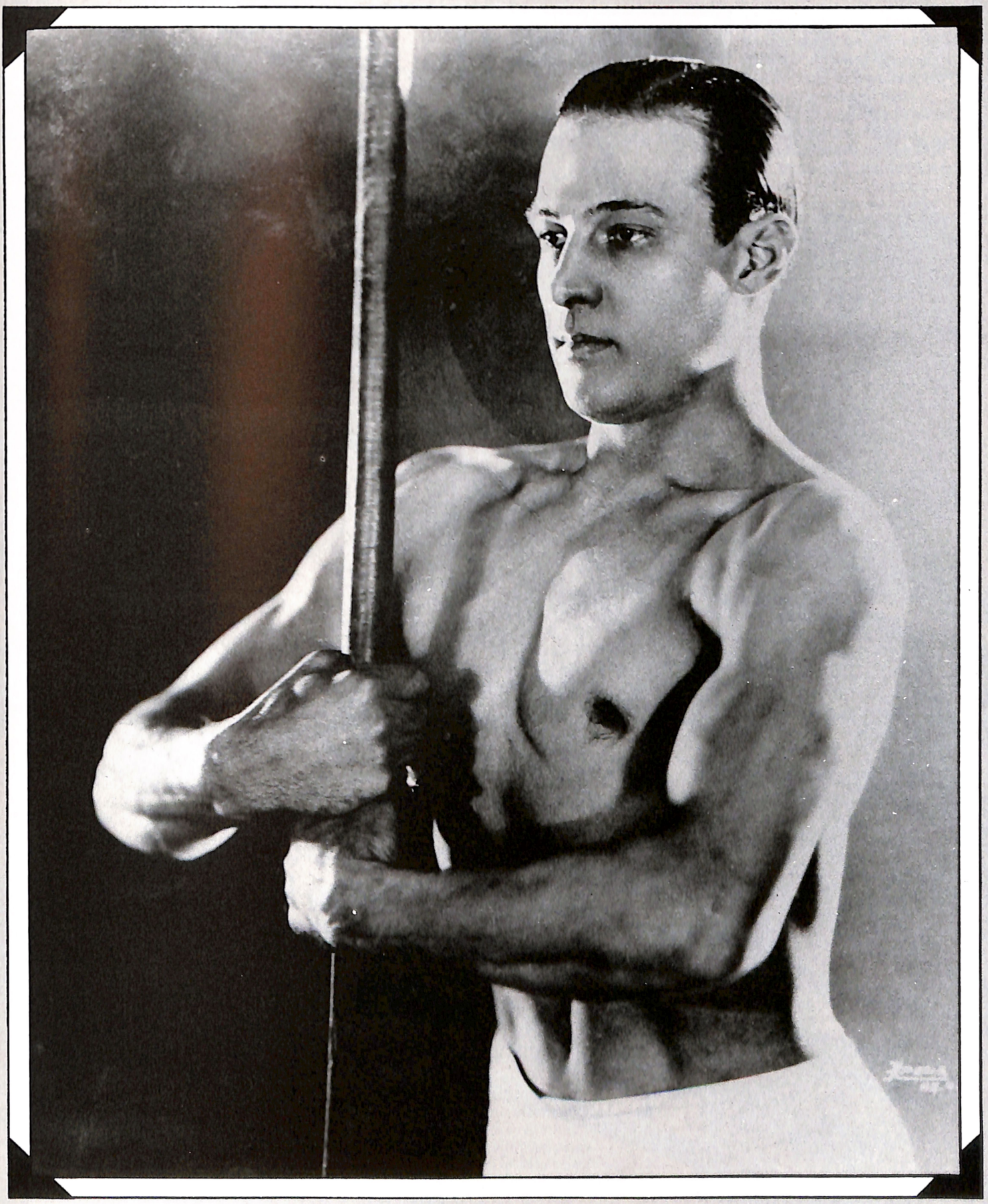
The film that catapulted Anger to recognition was a hot little item called *Fireworks*. "The plot concerns a dissatisfied dreamer who awakes, goes out into the night seeking a 'light' and is drawn through the needle's eye. A dream of a dream, he returns to a bed less empty than before. It's dedicated to Denhaum Fonts, who first 'turned me on.' This flick is all I have to say about being seventeen, the United States Navy, American Christmas and the Fourth of July." In 1963 Anger followed *Fireworks* with the movie that really established him as the most important underground filmmaker: *Scorpio Rising* (Anger's ascendant sign), divided into four parts: "Boys and Bolts," "Image Maker," "Walpurgis Party" and "Rebel Rouser." Anger dedicated it to, among others, "James Dean, Hart Crane, the Society of Spartans, Hell's Angels and all overgrown boys who will ever follow the whistle of Love's Brother."

Anger's cinemagic is at its apogee in *Scorpio*, a veritable thirty-minute chorus line of compelling scenes. The fact that it is silent makes it even more powerful. There is, however, a sound track that comes from "The Top Ten, the hits of 1963," and the hits never hit harder than they do here. *Scorpio* opens with some bikers jostling around in a garage while Ricky Nelson croons "Fools Rush In." Later, the boys put on their blue jeans and black leather to Bobby Vinton singing "Blue Velvet." Brando and Dean get the call for Elvis' chant of "Devil in Disguise," then the camera cuts back and forth from a Brooklyn biker to Jesus Christ accompanied by "He's a Rebel." An all-male costume party opens with "Party Lights," and a record, carrying the lyrics "Torture, torture, baby, you're torturing me," spins while a guy is covered with mustard and gang-banged.

"I like playing things against each other," Anger explains in a soft,







If Anger's Hollywood Babylon *takes a moviegoer behind-the-scenes with perverse glee, Hollywood has itself produced a plethora of "inside" movies detailing star ups and downs, as these publicity posters show. Opposite, the sidewalks of Hollywood show newcomers whose shoes they'll have to fill. Photographs by Jarry Lang.*

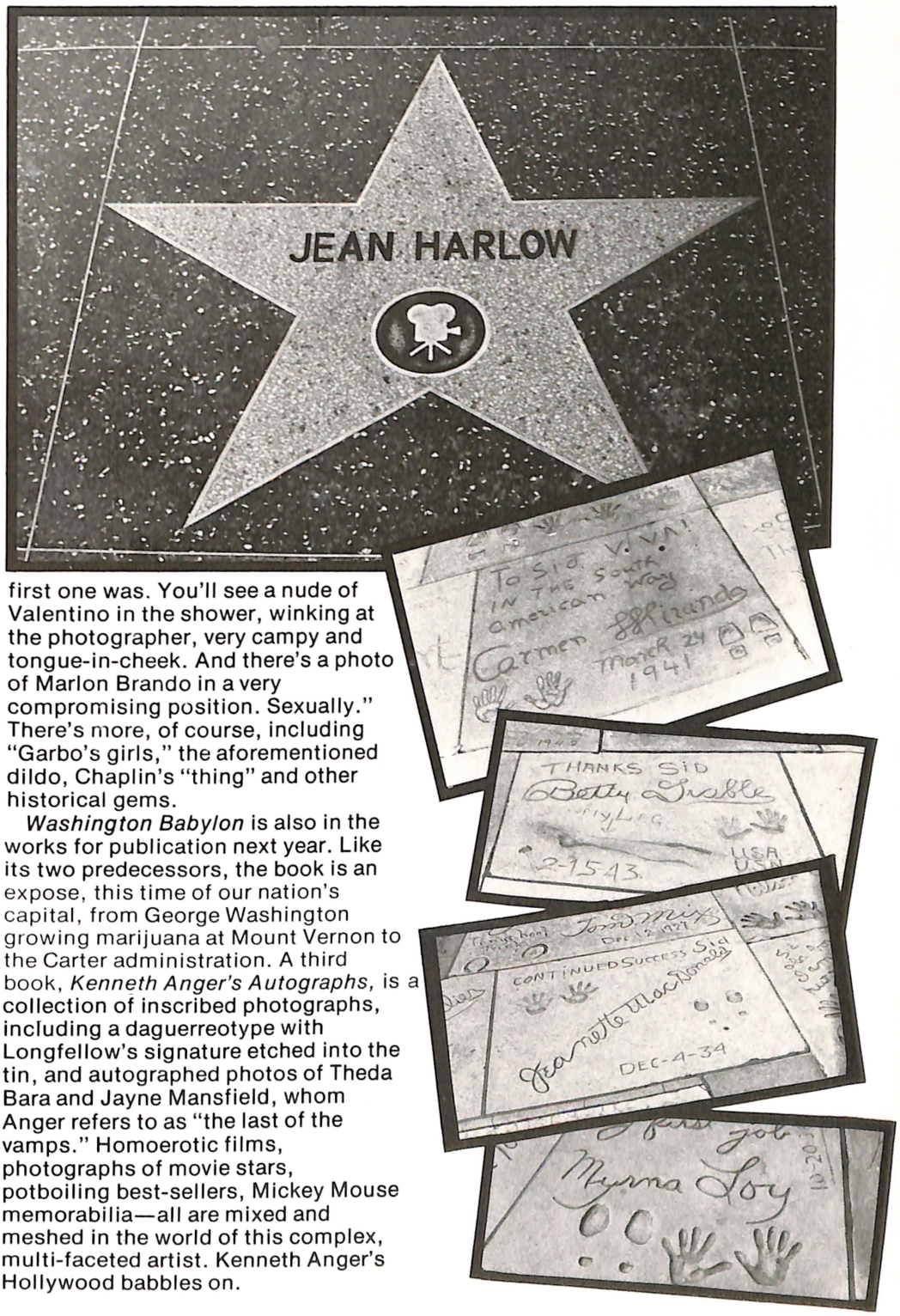
M-G-M PRESENTS
LANA TURNER
KIRK DOUGLAS
WALTER PIDGEON
DICK POWELL
The Bad And The Beautiful
CO-STARRING
BARRY SULLIVAN · GLORIA GRAHAME · GILBERT ROLAND
with LEO G. CARROLL · VANESSA BROWN
Screen Play by CHARLES SCHNEE · Directed by VINCENTE MINNELLI · Produced by JOHN HOUSEMAN

HOLLYWOOD THEN....

persuasive voice. "It sets something going in your mind, like velvet against leather. It's a kind of sensuous thing. Often what I'll do is that in the lyrics of the song they'll be talking about a girl but on the screen you'll see a boy. That's something I do quite often. For instance you hear '*She* wore blue velvet' but on the screen you see a guy, his vanity and tight blue jeans. Narcissism."

Anger recently completed the filming of *Lucifer Rising*, a sequel to *Scorpio* that has been ten years in the making. "I'm waiting for the soundtrack. I gave up on Jimmy Page after waiting a long time for him to put something together. This had much to do with the fact that I couldn't communicate with him any more because he was on smack." Page has been replaced by longtime cohort and convicted murderer Bobby Beausoleil, presently in solitary confinement in a California penitentiary. Anger managed to get permission to provide Beausoleil with recording material for himself and for the twelve or so musicians who accompany him. Among those in the group are the former drummer of Santana and several other rock-and-roll luminaries. "Fortunately, or whatever, a certain number of musicians have a propensity for getting in Dutch," Anger comments, referring to the considerable amount of them who are locked behind bars. He adds that it "will probably be the first movie score to be written in jail.'

While waiting for the score, Anger has begun work on three books. *Hollywood Babylon*, a sensation when it was published in 1975, was merely the tip of the hot iceberg of "inside dope" in his Hollywood achives. "I've always collected press clippings and material since I was a kid, including stuff from before my time that my grandmother saved. It was a kid's hobby, like stamp collecting." In his first book, Anger shocked and titillated his readers with such juicy items as Rudolph Valentino as a "lesbian marriage broker," Ramon Novarro being bludgeoned to death with an art deco dildo given him by Valentino, Marlene Dietrich's "man-drag," and director R.W. Murnau giving preferential treatment to casting gays in his films. A sequel to this, *Hollywood Babylon, Part II*, will be even more daring and thorough, bringing things up to the Begelman scandal. "My publisher (Putnam's) isn't afraid to let me print things, like my first one was. You'll see a nude of Valentino in the shower, winking at the photographer, very campy and tongue-in-cheek. And there's a photo of Marlon Brando in a very compromising position. Sexually." There's more, of course, including "Garbo's girls," the aforementioned dildo, Chaplin's "thing" and other historical gems.



Washington Babylon is also in the works for publication next year. Like its two predecessors, the book is an expose, this time of our nation's capital, from George Washington growing marijuana at Mount Vernon to the Carter administration. A third book, *Kenneth Anger's Autographs*, is a collection of inscribed photographs, including a daguerreotype with Longfellow's signature etched into the tin, and autographed photos of Theda Bara and Jayne Mansfield, whom Anger refers to as "the last of the vamps." Homoerotic films, photographs of movie stars, potboiling best-sellers, Mickey Mouse memorabilia—all are mixed and meshed in the world of this complex, multi-faceted artist. Kenneth Anger's Hollywood babbles on.

...AND NOW

Star-studded award shows and tributes bring out the Hollywood old guard, such as Bette Davis, right, and Liz Taylor, below, both recently honored for superlative career achievements. Below right, veteran actors John Wayne and Bob Hope jocularly congratulate La Taylor.

Photographs by Frank Teti

Left to right: electric new star Shaun Cassidy on a recent Goldie Hawn TV special; a playful Richard Thomas, who reportedly would like to play the gay athlete in director Frank Perry's upcoming *The Front Runner*; and Barbra Streisand, whose "Evergreen" just garnered several Grammys in addition to last year's Oscar.

Left: Bombshells of today, Ann-Margret, and yesterday, Mae West, whose *Sextette* isn't, advance reports say, going to cause a comeback.